

June 28, 1959

Dr. Katherine S. Wilson  
National Institutes of Health  
Bethesda 14, Maryland

Dear Kay:

I am full of regret to have to write this letter, but I must ask you to accept my withdrawal from the Genetics Study Section. In any case I would not be able to participate fully in the next meeting this September, so I would ask you to make this effective now. It has been a pleasant and rewarding experience to work with you and with all our friends and colleagues on the study section, and I really will miss it. But I am beginning to see how detrimental my distraction with a number of responsibilities of this kind is to the fulfillment of my first and most personal responsibilities as a scientist, and I have to make a choice which is dictated by what I hope are my best capacities as well as inclinations.

The occasion does move me to say how deeply indebted I should be as a scientist to people like yourself and our colleagues on the section. By dint of your energy and judgment and dedication you are making a system continue to work remarkably well long after it should have collapsed under its own weight, I am not optimistic enough to expect that this will be indefinitely postponed, but perhaps it will long enough for other techniques to evolve. Meanwhile I am very much disturbed, and this is no joke, that our scientists are becoming more and more deeply involved in sciencemanship instead of science-- perhaps science in practise is becoming too complex for the individual scientist to survive in it for more than a few years of youthful vigor and novelty of approach. If so it may be futile to try to avert the obligations of scientific statesmanship, which can be an alternative service. I hope some of our statesmen, including your associates at NIH, are giving some thought to the preservation of creativity as well as to the material support of science -- these are not altogether disconnected questions of course, and there is no doubt the latter has had to receive first attention.

My personal thanks to you for all you have done to make this an easy and pleasant job-- and I believe me, I can't write this letter without a sharp twinge of conscience which your own sympathy would only partly relieve. I'm sure I'll be seeing you from time to time; till then

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg

CC: Walter Burdette